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A Statement About

The National Council on Religion in Higher Education

Incorporated 1923

Charles Foster Kent
Founder

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Our Basic Concern

The National Council on Religion in Higher Education is a group of persons who believe it to be of utmost importance that men and women be intelligent about religion. It seeks to promote such intelligence by improving the status of religion as a subject in the college curriculum. The Council is concerned with the development of such attitudes towards religion that its reconstructive and stabilizing resources may be available for the stupendous tasks of modern life. It believes that spiritual values are discoverable in all the activities of man, and regards the work of education as complete only when it has sensitized persons to these values and made them skilled in their conservation.

In the light of this central concern, emphasis is naturally placed on *persons*. The Council desires to help develop teachers who combine sound learning and culture with human feeling; personalities of such dimensions as to command the respect of colleagues and students, who shall make education a vital and friendly process of mutual growth.

How it sets out to realize these objectives, what it has accomplished, and what the future seems to hold, are indicated briefly in this booklet.

The Purpose and Method of the Council

The Council attempts to do a very simple, but exceedingly important thing: namely, to improve the status of religion in the colleges and universities of the United States and Canada by providing better teachers.

To this end the Council selects with great care a few men and women of proved intellectual capacity who have also given evidence of genuine interest in religion and in people, and appoints them "Fellows."

Such "Fellows" receive financial assistance in the form of Fellowships which aid them in securing the best possible preparation afforded by the graduate schools of America or Europe. Guidance and counsel in this preparatory period and later, are provided by the Council through leaders in education and religion who are associated in its work.

With numerous opportunities to perform other services in this complex field, the Council holds consistently to its chief objective: the training of well-equipped teachers and leaders who shall help give religion a respected place in the curriculum, and make it functionally vital in the lives of educated men and women.

A Bit of History

When Professor Charles Foster Kent in 1922 confronted a small group of business and professional men, educators and religious leaders, with the religious situation in the colleges, he stated that the basic need was for better teaching of religion. As a subject in the curriculum of many colleges, religion was in disrepute. Its standards of scholarship were often below those of other fields of knowledge. Dr. Kent held that religion could never be influential among thoughtful men and women until it was respected. Until its representatives on college faculties were as thoroughly trained in modern scholarship and were as competent in their fields as their colleagues, religion could not be expected to command the respect of students or of the faculty.

Under Professor Kent's inspiration, the Council entered on this task of providing better equipped teachers of religion. Since his death the work has gone steadily on with natural modifications. Religion cannot be pigeonholed into a Department. The

search for spiritual values is as important in psychology, sociology, education, or other fields as in courses labeled "religion." In recognition of the fact that religious attitudes are developed in a variety of experiences, the Council has appointed a number of Fellows in fields other than what, in academic parlance, are called "religious," and has convincing evidence of the wisdom of this move.

Achievements

Eighty Fellows have completed their graduate training, and are now holding appointments as faculty members and administrative officers in colleges and universities in various parts of the country. Included in these institutions are: Dartmouth, Yale, Columbia, Smith, Vassar, Mt. Holyoke, Swarthmore, Brown, Michigan, Chicago, Denver, Whittier, Occidental, Furman, Alabama, North Carolina, and Davidson. For a complete list with names of Fellows and positions held, see booklet issued by the Council entitled: "Results in Human Values."

Altogether one hundred thirty-five men and women have been appointed Fellows of the Council.

Forty Fellows are now in study in graduate schools at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Chicago, Union Theological Seminary, Boston, Pennsylvania, Stanford, University of California, and in European Universities such as Oxford, Berlin, Vienna.

Several booklets dealing with inquiries and projects of importance have been issued by the Council. Among them are: "Undergraduate Courses in Religion in Tax-Supported Colleges and Universities in America"; "State, Constitutional, Legislative, and Supreme Court Provisions Relating to Religious Influences in Tax Supported Universities, Colleges and Schools"; "Undergraduate Courses in Religion," "Student Counseling," "Bibliography of Biblical History, Literature, Archaeology, and Religion." The Council does not carry on an extensive publication program of its own. Rather it encourages Fellows to publish through existing journals and societies in their special fields.

Fellows are increasingly making substantial contributions to their chosen fields through their writings. These are appearing in various magazines and journals, such as, the Journal of Reli-

gion, Psychological Bulletin, Journal of General Psychology, Christian Education, Religious Education. Several Fellows have recently published books which are bringing gratifying recognition to the Fellows themselves, as well as substantiating the hopes and judgment of the Council in the appointments which it has made.

The Council cooperates with the Hazen Foundation in the conduct of the Hazen Conference held annually late in the summer, and attended by faculty members, administrators, religious workers in colleges, and others interested in resources and methods for the more effective adjustment of individual college students to their life situations.

What Fellows Do: How the Council's Objectives are Achieved Through its Fellows

Dean Herbert E. Hawkes of Columbia University, who is President of the Council, recently said:

"During the last twenty-five years the place of religion in our colleges, in the home, and among young men and women in general, has assumed an entirely new aspect. It remains true that human beings are the same and that religion is just as important in the development of a well-rounded character as ever. In colleges, nevertheless, with the failure of the older methods of approach, it is requiring time and wisdom without stint to find the most effective means of showing young people that religion is really important."

No single approach or methodology is universally applicable. Situations and problems vary with the traditions and organization of the particular institution, the attitude of faculties, the backgrounds of students.

The Council, therefore, works out no formal programs which Fellows are expected to adopt. Rather it trusts its Fellows, carefully chosen and prepared as adequately as possible, to work out the common ideals in ways congenial to their interests and temperaments and appropriate to the traditions and life of the institutions which they serve.

Fellows are appointed to faculties as any other members are appointed. The Council assists them in securing positions, but,

by and large, positions are secured through the recommendations of the departments of graduate schools in which they have done their work.

Thus appointed, Fellows fill academic positions according to their fields of specialization. The majority teach courses in the history of religions, philosophy of religions, religious literature, religious and character education. Some teach sociology; others economics; others psychology, literature, and the like. Several Fellows are acting as Deans and administrative officers.

The Unifying Element

What unifies a group of such diversity? The unity is shown in certain activities which are common to most Fellows, whatever subjects they may be teaching.

(1) All Fellows will be found giving considerable time to individual students in counseling relations on personal problems —vocational, educational, sex and social adjustments—and especially problems of religious adjustment.

(2) Most Fellows will be found active in efforts to modify and improve educational procedures in ways to enhance the central emphasis on the student as a growing person.

(3) Many Fellows will be found actively cooperating in voluntary religious enterprises of students and faculty looking towards more adequate provisions for religious life and growth, such as worship, the organization of religious activities, of voluntary discussion groups, and the like.

(4) All Fellows in their places as members of faculties and in personal contacts are helping to interpret genuine religion in such ways as to eliminate misunderstandings and misinterpretations, and to improve the status of vital, non-sectarian religion in the college.

The "Week of Work"

Once a year a large proportion of the Fellows come together for study and Fellowship. Discussions are held on the various problems connected with their common tasks, and with the achievement of the Council's objectives. Group sessions are also

held corresponding to fields of specialization. Outstanding leaders in American education are brought in as Consultants. The "Week of Work" has come to be one of the most important methods of keeping Fellows sensitive to the problems and opportunities of the field, and for securing resources the better to do their work as teachers. The deliberations of this group in the "Week of Work" are already contributing much to American education.

How the Council is Financed

The Council requires for carrying out this program approximately $40,000 a year. This is secured from some 200 individuals who have become interested in the enterprise and share its ideals. Two Foundations also contribute to its budget. The Directors are seeking to add to the number of its supporters men and women who believe in this approach to religion and education, and who desire to assist in the support of the Council's program.

Approximately $25,000 of the budget goes to the support of the Fellowships and to finance the Week of Work. The balance is used for salaries, office and travel expenses, and for certain other activities including occasional publications, cooperation with other agencies, particularly in the development of adequate training facilities in the field of higher education, and for consultant services for colleges desiring the benefit of the Council's experience in providing more adequately for the religious growth of students. No small part of the time of the Staff is spent in personal consultation with Fellows. The Council maintains a placement service for Fellows, and assists colleges in finding first rate men and women for posts in its fields.

The Larger Issue: Is Religion to Play a Significant Rôle in the Modern World?

Whether religion is to be important in the lives of men and women in the future depends largely on whether it is able to come to terms with modern knowledge. If it is to fulfil its eternal mission as a resource and as a reconstructive force, its message and method must be rediscovered and reinterpreted.

Essentially the Council is a group of people—from education, business and organized religion—who feel keenly about this

deeper issue, and are determined to play an active part in its solution. For such a task unusual demands are made on the modern educated man, especially if he hopes to be a leader of youth. He must know historic religions, but he must also have a broad background of knowledge of other fields. If he is to live his life in the atmosphere of the modern university, he must be thoroughly trained in some one field, which does not restrict his horizon, but enables him to discover and interpret spiritual values in that field.

Such men and women the Council is seeking to appoint to its Fellowships. It *must* have men and women of various faiths as well as persons who, though essentially religious, are not necessarily actively identified with organized religion. It *must* have psychologists, sociologists, economists, and the like, as well as people trained in the historic religious disciplines. The immensity of the task and the cooperative nature of the thinking process demand such catholicity.

The Future

The response which has come from University administrators and faculty members where Fellows have taught can be interpreted in no other way than as a mandate for the Council to go forward. Despite the difficulties of the present situation, the Board feels that we are here dealing with issues of permanent importance for American society.

Consider for example, these excerpts from our correspondence:

The President of one of the older New England colleges writes: "I have only good words to speak of ——. Both are excellent scholars, gentlemen of the highest character and their influence is most wholesome among the faculty and the student body. . . . If the National Council on Religion in Higher Education can find and train men like these as its Fellows, it is amply warranting its existence."

From the President of one of the well-known women's colleges in the East: "I can only speak in the highest terms of Professor ——'s work and influence here. He is now head of our Department of Religion and there is no member of the faculty who is more highly regarded both by his colleagues and by his students. He is steadily growing in reputation, as I find to my cost on ac-

count of the attempts of other institutions to get him away from us. If your Council is responsible for many Fellows of this calibre it is doing a very important work."

From the President of a college on the Pacific Coast: "Professor ——, who is a Fellow of the National Council on Religion in Higher Education, is now a teacher on our faculty here. He is held in very high esteem by both students and teachers. . . . . The assistance which the National Council gave has made a very great contribution to him personally and to the institution which he serves. I very greatly appreciate the splendid work of the National Council and want to commend you upon the success that is attained."

From the President of a "Big Ten" university: "Professor —— has rendered —— University such distinguished service that I am most pleased to state that in teaching ability and general influence he is an outstanding man on this campus. The National Council on Religion in Higher Education is performing a great public service in the cooperation it is giving in the training of such men for service in American Universities."

The Immediate Question

The Council is committed to assisting in their educational plans for the academic year 1931-2 some forty men and women. This will require approximately $25,000. Without endowment, the Council is feeling keenly the stringency of the present economic situation. Immediate assistance is needed from men and women who are caught by the deeper significance of this cause to which the Council is giving itself. The Fellows of the Council are investing their lives in it. Are there not others, financially able, especially among those who have or expect to have, sons and daughters in college, who will invest a portion of the substance of which they are stewards? The Board of Directors believes that there are, and invites such to share with us in the problems and satisfactions of this cause. Contributions may be sent to the Treasurer, Mr. Cleveland E. Dodge, 40 Wall Street, New York, N. Y.

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The Office of the Council is located in Barnes Hall, Ithaca, N. Y.